



Scottish Natural Heritage

**Achanalt Marshes  
Site of Special Scientific Interest**

**SITE MANAGEMENT STATEMENT**

**Site code: 12**

**EAST HIGHLAND AREA  
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**Purpose**



This is a public statement prepared by SNH for owners and occupiers of the SSSI. It outlines the reasons it is designated as a SSSI and provides guidance on how its special natural features should be conserved or enhanced. This Statement does not affect or form part of the statutory notification and does not remove the need to apply for consent for operations requiring consent.

We welcome your views on this statement.

This statement is available in Gaelic on request.

**Description of the site**

Achanalt Marshes Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) lies on the flood plain of the River Bran, midway between Achnasheen and Garve in central Ross-shire. It is seven km west of the village of Lochluichart at an altitude of 120 metres.

The site includes Loch Achanalt and Loch Odhar (both neutral to moderately nutrient rich water bodies), with associated fen, marsh, grassland and heath all lying within an extensive upland floodplain. It has been notified as a SSSI for the outstanding diversity of open water and fen habitats which occur there. The influence of water levels on the flood plain is of particular importance in providing a wide and diverse range of transitional vegetation types.

The site is also notified for the assemblage of breeding birds (particularly waders and wildfowl) that it supports. Waders breeding on the site include: golden plover, common sandpiper, wood sandpiper, dunlin, curlew, snipe, redshank, oystercatcher and lapwing. Wildfowl that breed on the site are: goosander, red-breasted merganser, mute swan, wigeon, tufted duck, teal and mallard.

The site has also been classified as Achanalt Marshes Special Protection Area (SPA) and is of European importance because it regularly supports 50% of the British population of breeding wood sandpiper.

The lochs were monitored during July 2004 and found to be in favourable condition. The water quality was good, nutrient levels were appropriate and representative plant communities were found. Both open water or shoreline habitats extents appeared unchanged and water levels fluctuated naturally.

The fen habitat was monitored in October 2002 and was also found to be in favourable

condition. The amount of bare ground and vehicle tracking were all within acceptable limits and the water levels and vegetation was of the appropriate height.

When monitored in July 2001, the breeding bird assemblage was considered to be in favourable condition due to the range of breeding birds present. Similarly, when monitored during July 2002 the breeding population of wood sandpiper was considered to be in favourable condition.

<b>Natural features of Achanalt Marshes SSSI</b>	<b>Condition of feature (and date monitored)</b>	<b>Other relevant designations</b>
Mesotrophic lochs	Favourable, maintained (July 2004)	
Flood plain fen	Favourable, maintained (October 2002)	
Breeding bird assemblage	Favourable, maintained (July 2001)	SPA

<b>Features of overlapping Achanalt Marshes SPA that are not notified as SSSI natural features</b>	<b>Condition of feature (date monitored)</b>	<b>Designation (SPA or SAC)</b>
Wood sandpiper, breeding	Favourable, maintained (July 2002)	SPA

### **Past and present management**

In the past some of the grassland adjacent to the loch and river was used for intensive agriculture and stock grazing, and an extensive system of drains is still visible. Most of these drains are no longer effective. A small area of the site was damaged by tree planting in 1968.

The SSSI forms part of an extensive deer forest and is currently used for rough grazing, some forestry and recreational fishing. Cattle and/or sheep grazing takes place around much of the loch and some of this is for conservation purposes, as part of the site is a RSPB reserve. Some rush cutting also takes place to improve the habitats for breeding birds. The lochs themselves are primarily used for trout fishing with little other recreational use. The Conon District Fishery Board (CDFB) manages the River Bran (including the Achanalt Marshes) for salmon.

The site is unaffected by hydro electric installations upstream but the presence of a small hydro electric barrage four kilometres downstream does mean that at certain times of the year water can back up and cause flooding. This is not a problem in the winter, but it can be damaging in the summer when waders are attempting to nest around the shore.

Railway viaduct at eastern end of site



A railway line forms the northern boundary of the site and crosses the River Bran immediately downstream of the loch. Maintenance work on the railway or the bridge can affect the site. The site looks very attractive from the road and railway and although access is not easy (because of the presence of the railway line and the river) there is still some informal recreation, primarily walking and birdwatching.

## **Objectives for Management** (and key factors influencing the condition of natural features)

We wish to work with the owners and occupiers to protect the site and to maintain and where necessary enhance its features of special interest. SNH aims to carry out site survey, monitoring and research as appropriate to increase our knowledge and understanding of the site and its natural features and to monitor the effectiveness of its management.

The EU Habitats and Birds Directives oblige Government to avoid, in SACs and SPAs, the deterioration of natural habitats and the habitats of species, as well as disturbance of the species for which the areas have been designated, in so far as such disturbance could be significant in relation to the objectives of these Directives. The objectives below have been assessed against these requirements. All authorities proposing to carry out or permit to be carried out operations likely to have a significant effect on the European interests of this SSSI must assess those operations against the relevant Natura conservation objectives (which are listed on our website through the SNHi - SiteLink facility).

### **1. To maintain the extent and condition of the fen habitats, by for example:**

- cutting of rushes.
- seasonal grazing by cattle and / or sheep.
- management of the wild deer population.

### **2. To maintain the water quality and hydrological regime that supports open water features of interests.**

### **3. To maintain /support the increase of populations of breeding waders and waterfowl by for example:**

- avoiding significant disturbance from land management, railway maintenance and recreation during the bird breeding seasons.
- extending important habitats by removing areas of planted conifers.
- maintaining appropriate summer water levels.

### **Other factors affecting the natural features of the site**

The site is at the edge of the range of some of the species of importance, and their continued presence at the site can be affected by factors affecting the population operating beyond the extent of the site.

**Date last reviewed:** 29 September 2010